

PASSIONATE ABOUT MUSIC, ART, AND TRAVEL: Florence Tanaka of Wailuku Hongwanji Mission by Joan Tamori



MUSICAL NOTES

"As long as you're willing, keep an open mind, and come with a positive attitude, you can learn anything! Education is never ending." These are the words that have guided and motivated Florence Tanaka into living a life rich with experiences and knowledge. Florence has been a long time organist at Wailuku Hongwanji Mission for over 30 years. She has also dedicated many years of leadership and service to affiliated organizations, such as the Rakuen Club and the Buddhist Women's Association. It is with gratitude that I am given the opportunity to share the story of this amazing woman with our readers. If you happen to be acquainted with Florence, you are considered to be very fortunate as you will know instantly that her heart and mind exudes the Nembutsu teaching. I have experienced this feeling in my interaction with her at church every Sunday, and it was no different when I stepped into her recently to interview her. I cover all that encomence Tanaka.

Please join me hands of the clock back in old girl whose ideas sur- and who already positions to travel and see the raised in Wailuku, Maui, three, thus she knew and make sacrifices to help all of them. Her encourage- the knowledge that one of pened to be an excellent and her brother both took Corley at another



Florence Tanaka

fortunately had a piano they could practice on. In one instance, Florence fondly remembers playing a duet with her brother. Unbeknownst to her, the piano was to become an introduction to more music that would eventually take on a major role in her life.

During her high school years, she assisted at WHM by babysitting Mrs. Edith Izumi's sons. (Mrs. Izumi was the daughter of Bishop Ryuten Kashiwa). She also helped the church with clerical duties during conventions and meetings and teaching Sunday school classes. Following graduation from H. P. Baldwin High School, she attended the University of Hawaii at Manoa, majoring in elementary education. While residing at the Honpa Hongwanji Mission dormitory during those college years, she became a member of the Honpa Hongwanji Choir. She also joined the university's Rainbow YBA club which consisted of dormitory students and also students from Oahu who were Buddhists. Enduring friendships among many in the club were formed. Mr. Kaoru Uto was the leader of the group and was well known for his influential role in propagating music in our temples for many years.

Upon graduation, her first assignment was at Pu'ukoli'i School, a school practically unheard of at the time, which was located across of the Kaanapali area on Maui. Without a car, transportation was difficult so she later transferred to King Kamehameha III School in Lahaina thereby being able to carpool with friends. She recalls being

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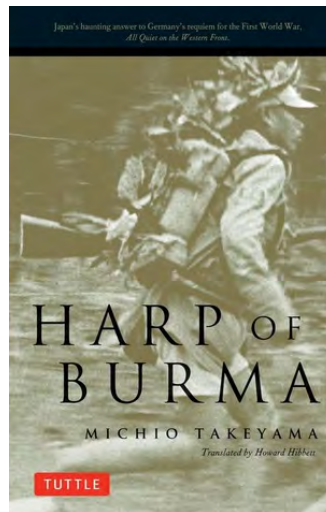
MUSIC'S POWER

Music's ability to move men to acts of courage and humanity in perilous times is sometimes recognized in history and literature. One such example occurs in Michio Takeyama's 1964 novel, *Harp of Burma*, a tale of a group of Japanese soldiers who brave the end of World War II, armed with a heart full of song. Taught by the musician company captain to sing and harmonize, the soldiers practice whenever possible on the rugged Burma campaign. The soldiers are accompanied by a gifted harpist, Mizushima, whose mysterious disappearance to become a Burmese monk dedicated to burying the battlefield dead poses the unsettling question of the novel: why war? In describing the soldiers' return home after the war, the novelist says the men of this company are the only ones to look cheerful, among the emaciated and exhausted. Without song, "they would never have come home in remarkably high spirits."

Near war's end, the 'singing company' finds itself one evening in a village clearing, singing for its supper, as it were. In the middle of the "concert," the men suddenly realize that the audience has slowly vanished, leaving the singers vulnerable. Sensing ambush, the captain orders the men to continue singing while quietly donning their bat-

tle gear and moving into positions in the enveloping darkness.

As always, they end their singing with their favorite song, *Hanyu no Yado*, well within earshot of the encroaching enemy. Now quiet and braced to fight, the captain stops just short of giving the order to charge, when out of the forest soars a voice – a high voice bearing a clear melody. "The voice in the forest was joined by two or three more, and then by voices from here, there, and everywhere. It was *Hanyu no Yado* sung in English: 'Home, home, sweet home....'" Soon, "the forest was full of singing voices.... We joined in and sang too.... One by one, shadowy figures came running out of that forest into the open space. They were British soldiers..." for *Hanyu no Yado* was actually an old English melody that expressed nostalgia for the joys of fond and distant homes. The British soldiers were therefore "astonished and moved to hear their enemy – the dangerous enemy they had surrounded high in the mountains of



Burma – singing this song."

"By this time we were no longer enemies. The battle never began. Before we quite knew what had happened, we were all singing together and coming up to one another to shake hands. Finally we built a bonfire in the middle of the open space and sat around it singing in chorus under the baton of our captain.... That night we learned that the war had ended three days earlier. Having no way to let their ferocious enemy know, the British troops thought they might have to annihilate us in order to mop up resistance...."

While the account is fictional, it resembles a scene said to have taken place in real life. In the scarred battlefields of France in World War I, German and British forces, within earshot of each other, reportedly began singing Christmas carols on Christmas Day. In short order, laying down arms and bearing white flags of truce, both sides gradually emerged from their trenches and sang together on the battlefield. Enemy combatants were friends for a day, despite language differences, before returning to their positions to resume fighting the next day.

It is surely no coincidence that music, which communicates so powerfully, contributes so much to the Hongwanji and indeed to all faiths.



Florence Tanaka (from page 1)

acquainted with special teacher friends like the late Emma Farden Sharpe, famous hula instructor. Paia School was her following teaching assignment for a year. At this point in life, Florence's longing to travel the world grew more prevalent in her mind. However, her fierce desire to travel was curtailed by the reality of family priorities. In order to experience a new place without having to spend much money, she applied for an exchange position in the Los Angeles area and was able to reside with relatives. Her experiences teaching in a rough area school are not pleasant memories but on weekends she was able to attend services at Los Angeles Buddhist Church. Yearning for more travel, she then applied for overseas teaching in Japan but grabbed the more available opening in a military school in Okinawa for a school year. She resigned from Hawaii's department of education and became an employee under the federal government.

As we chatted, Florence recalled very easily, all the amazing and exotic places she has traveled to during her teaching career. Each teaching assignment enabled her to travel to a different country and increased her experiences and knowledge bank. The approximately 20 foreign places she has trekked to in a span of seven years are: Okinawa, Japan, Cambodia, Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, England, Paris, Wales, Scotland,

Ireland, Germany, Cairo, Nile River, Bethlehem, Damascus, Lebanon, Italy, Russia, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. In Japan, her exposure to various types of art such as origami, lapidary, sumi-e, wood carving, ikebana, and tea ceremony, added to her knowledge of art and art teaching repertoire.

In 1964, Florence returned to Maui and taught for a year at Wailuku Elementary School. She then transferred to Benjamin Parker Elementary School in Kaneohe in 1966. In the summer of 1967, the school sustained a fire and therefore needed to be rebuilt. Florence was approached by its school principal to help design the structures of the new school. Included was an art room completely equipped with many sinks, huge supply of closets, a kiln, and a potter's wheel, purely state of the art. She served as the art specialist for nearly 20 years. During this time, she also immersed herself in the school's music programs.

In 1984, she decided to return home to primarily give care for her mom while taking on the position of district art specialist for all of Maui county. It was at this time that she reunited with Mrs. Izumi who had injured her hand and was not able to play the organ for services. Florence practiced, learned, and played gathas on the organ for the early morning asaji services and eventually played for regular services for many years under

the tenures of five ministers. Subsequently she completed a one semester stint at Kahului Elementary School and then decided to retire in 1987 to focus on devoting time to her mother who became a resident at Hale Makua Health Services.

Musically, besides playing the piano and organ, Florence was a member of the Maui Senior Harmonics where her group would frequently entertain at Hale Makua, Roselani Place, the hospital, and at senior centers. Her altruism did not end there as she, until recently, continued to play favorite old time songs on the piano for the residents at Hale Makua and Roselani Place Senior Living facility.

Florence and the harmonica group offered music at her mother's funeral services in 1993. As time moved on, her father was also ailing and one can only imagine how very stressful these years were for her. She found salvation in the teachings of Jodo Shinshu and began writing down words from her thoughts and ultimately composed a gatha. Her poignant gatha, *Homeward I Go*, became the winning gatha in a music lyrics contest sponsored by the Honpa Hongwanji Mission Office of Buddhist Education music committee around 1994. This gatha has become a choir favorite for memorial and funeral services. Florence is a member of the WHM choir sharing her knowledge and expertise. (continued on page 4)

In March of 2014, she formed the Wailuku Hongwanji Dharma Strummers group and still enjoys empowering her students by teaching them to play the ukulele step by step.

They say that, “everything happens for a reason”. In her lifetime, Florence has met people along the way during both trying times and happy times, but these are the ones that have become her lasting and significant friendships. She bravely weathered the challenging times with the support of friends and family. She credits and admires her mother for instilling in her to learn all that she could and to take on opportunities that opened up for her. She also made mention of the wonderful analogies exemplified by Rev. Hiromi Kawaji who appropriately tied them in to the teachings of Jodo Shinshu which have helped to guide her life.

By seeing her with a smile upon her face, one would be unaware of Florence's physical ailments due in part from aging. Attending church services continues to delight her as she listens to sermons and interacts with her friends.

After concluding a nice visit with her, I left her home that day satisfied and grateful and truly impressed with this amazing woman. As she continually and generously does with her ukulele students, she encourages me with her praise and support. She is truly an inspiration to all!



Finding Dharma in Music

“FINDING DHARMA IN MUSIC” was the title of a sing-a-long activity shared with the participants of our recent O’ahu United BWA Seminar/Convention held at Mililani Hongwanji on November 18, 2017.

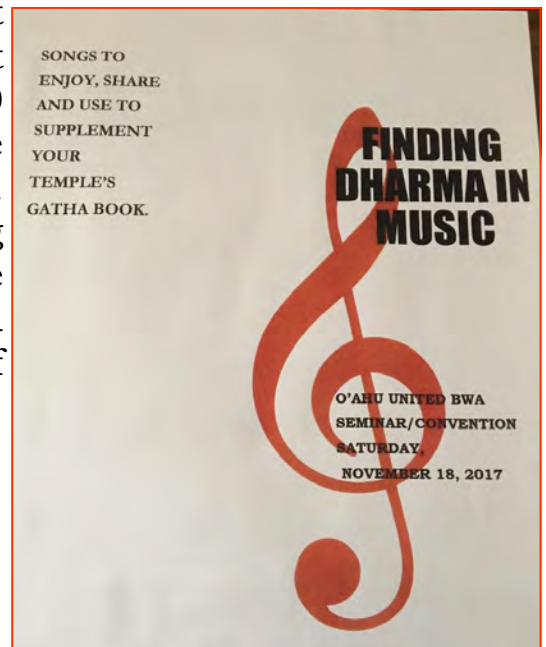
It was a time to enjoy music that we felt expressed the Dharma and would not be found in a gatha book. It was also a time to talk about the importance of music in our daily lives.

Participants were encouraged to bring ukuleles, guitars, etc. and join in! If you didn’t bring an instrument; there were tambourines, triangles and bells!

The songs ranged from **Buddha’s Great Light** to **Find Your Place** (composed by Molly P. Gluek...who sang her song with us).

Everyone went home with a booklet containing about 10 songs (including one for a sit down hula). Each participating temple and some guests also received a CD with some of the songs.

We had fun!!



HONOLULU DISTRICT

JIKOEN by Lily Horio

Mrs. Chihoko Yosemori and Mrs. Lily Horio are on “stand by” whenever junior organists, Chase and Kylie Urasaki and Jasmin Horio, need help with unfamiliar gathas. Jikoen’s Choir hasn’t been meeting regularly. Rev. Alan Urasaki can be relied upon to lend his strong voice to gatha singing.

MOILIILI by Lily Masuda

The Happy Strummers ukulele group performs a couple of times a year.

HAWAII BETSUIN CHOIR by Wendie Yumori

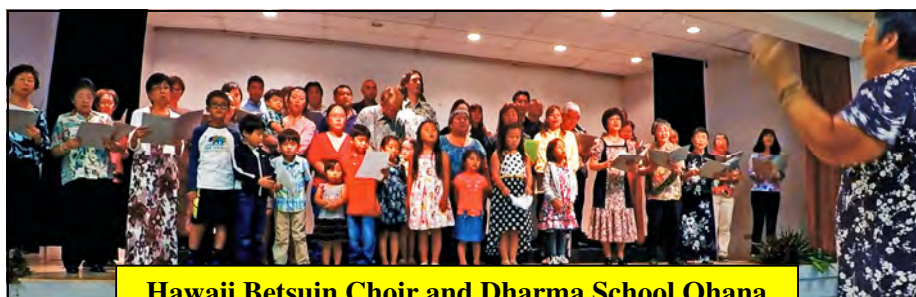
The Honpa Hongwanji Choir, which includes singers from Jikoen and Moiliili and Hawaii Betsuin, participated in the Hawaii Buddhist Council Buddha Day service on April 2 at Jodo Mission with a stirring rendition of the gatha, *Refuge*.



Honpa Hongwanji Choir at HBC Buddha Day service

Following this year’s very musical Eshin-ni/Kakushin-ni Day Service on April 30, a service which is also dedicated to World Peace, folks enjoyed more uplifting music in the social hall at Hawaii Betsuin’s revival of MusicFest. The theme of MusicFest 2017 was *May Peace Prevail...of Such I*

Dream. Leading off were Cameron Kubota and Caden Matsumoto of the Betsuin Dharma School Ukulele Group who sang *Just the Way you Are* and *Can’t Help Falling In Love*. Then, for the first time, the Betsuin Dharma School Ohana, students, teachers, and parents, combined with Betsuin Choir members to fill the entire stage and sing a spirited *Do the*



Hawaii Betsuin Choir and Dharma School Ohana singing at MusicFest 2017

Good You Know under the direction of Laura Nakasone.

The Betsuin Choir, under the direction of Mari Murakami and accompanied by Francis Okano, followed with *Shall I Dream a Dream?*, *Beyond What We See*, and *I Dream a World*, songs which describe a world in which peace may prevail. Francis Okano played his lovely piano arrangement of *Hamabe no Uta* and the grand finale of MusicFest was presented by special guest, Myohoji Mission’s resident minister, Rev. Takamasa Yamamura. Rev. Yamamura had, in his twenties, received training as an operatic tenor at Rome’s prestigious National Academy of Santa Cecilia. He sang *May Peace Prevail* with touching conviction. Also in attendance

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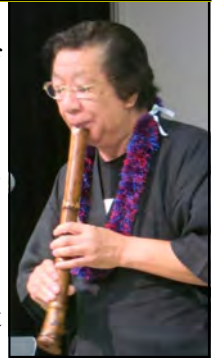
L to R: Bishop Eric Matsumoto, *May Peace Prevail* music composer-Dr. Takeo Kudo, lyricist-Carrie Kawamoto, soloist-Rev. Takamasa Yamamura, accompanist-Francis Okano, and MusicFest 2017 Chair-Wendie Yumori

HONOLULU DISTRICT (continued)

and very appreciative of his rendition were *May Peace Prevail* lyricist, Carrie Kawamoto, and music composer, Dr. Takeo Kudo.

Miyoshi Genzan

Hawaii Betsuin was pleased and privileged to host a concert on July 30 featuring Miyoshi Genzan, a shakuhachi performer who is at the highest level possible in the world of shakuhachi. He has performed internationally and his repertoire is extensive. With Francis Okano providing expert piano accompaniment, Miyoshi Genzan masterfully played *Hamabe no Uta*, *Takeda no Komoriuta*, *Yoimachigusa*, as well as the Beatles classic, *Hey Jude*, and the Titanic movie theme, *My Heart Will Go On*, for a large and very appreciative audience.



Hawaii Betsuin's beautiful and distinctive temple structure goes back 100 years to 1918, the year of temple completion. A Centennial Kick-off Service was held on Sept. 10 at Hawaii Betsuin to launch a year of centennial celebration. His Eminence Monshu Kojun Ohtani was in attendance, having also participated in the dedication of the Pacific Buddhist Academy's new facility. At the Centennial service, the Betsuin Choir presented the prelude, *Live and Light the World*, and joined with the Dharma School Ohana in singing *This Day of Peace*.

On Oct. 29, the public was invited by the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii to attend the Queen Lili'uokalani 100th Anniversary Tribute at Hawaii Betsuin. This Tribute service commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Queen's passing and also highlighted the significance of Queen Lili'uokalani's attendance, on May 19, 1901, at Shinran Shonin's Birthday Service at the former Fort Lane temple. In 1901, the news that the Queen of Hawaii had attended a Buddhist service caused quite a stir. Her visit boosted the esteem of temple members who had been hesitant about attending service because of the racial and religious discrimination much felt at the time. For this special Tribute service, the Betsuin Choir sang Japanese gathas of the era, *Nori no Miyama* and *Sambo no On*. Nola Nahulu directed the Hawaii Youth Opera Chorus in singing *He Mele Lahui Hawa'i* during the Processional and Recessional of the Royal Societies as well as *Nani na Pua Ko'olau*, composed by Lydia Paki (Queen Lili'uokalani).



Hawaii Youth Opera Chorus directed by Nola Nahulu at Queen Lili'uokalani

It seemed fitting that the Queen's most well-known composition, *Aloha 'Oe*, was sung by all attendees at the close of the service.

The 56th Nu'uau Valley Interfaith Thanksgiving Service was held at Harris United Methodist Church on Nov. 21 and Hawaii Betsuin Choir's contribution to the theme of the service, *We Choose Love*, was their performance of *You Can Build a Bridge*. Betsuin Choir members also joined the combined Interfaith Choir in singing the inspiring piece, *I Choose Love*; the last verse was sung powerfully as "*We*" *Choose Love*.

Interfaith Choir at 56th Nu'uau Valley Interfaith Thanksgiving Service



KAUAI DISTRICT by Gladys Fujiuchi

Hongwanji Members on Kauai Welcome Gomonsu Ohtani!



Kauai's ukulele group and singers sang *Beautiful Kauai* which was performed by Mrs. Sarah Date for the Gomonsu's visit on September 11, 2017.



Gomonsu Kojun Ohtani joins in the singing of *Furusato*.



PEACE DAY was observed at the Kauai Hongwanji Camp at Kokee on September 24. Honored guests were Bishop Matsumoto and Pieper Toyama. Learning some new gathas were part of the activities. Introduced gathas were *Together As One* by BJ Soriano, *It All Starts With You, Let Your Love Show*, and *Living Gratefully* by Debbie Kubota. The group also sang *Touched by Kindness* and *Each Day Anew*.

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"Musical Notes" is published biannually by the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii,
Office of Buddhist Education Music Committee.

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